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THROUGH THE LENS OF NEW MEDIA

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“What’s interesting about the shift from an industrial age to a technological age is that we keep inventing new media: movies, records, radio, television, the Internet, and now ebooks - and one of the things that’s most interesting about the invention of a new medium is watching it reinvent itself as it penetrates the culture.”

David Gerrold

To define new media with a single answer is an impossible task. Even old media were once new, and today’s new media is also constantly changing and evolving.ⁱ New Media can broadly be understood to include the use of new communication technologies for old or new purpose, a new way of using old technologies, and, in principle, all other possibilities for the exchange of social meaning.ⁱⁱ Historically, new media didn’t happen in a flash but originated from the media prior to it. Our understanding of new media largely comes from looking into the “rear-view mirror,” as Marshall McLuhan observed.ⁱⁱⁱ

'When faced with a totally new situation,' McLuhan famously says, 'we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past. We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future.'^{iv} As is the case with most all of McLuhan’s ingenious labels for profound relationships in media, once you begin looking for rear-view mirrorisms, you see them everywhere you turn in history. The telephone was first called the talking telegraph; the automobile the horseless carriage; the radio the wireless.^v Indeed, the rear-view becomes, for McLuhan, a fundamental operating principle for the evolution of media and its effect. Thus new media, although the terms refers to new, however it is the traditional media which have reinvented itself with changing times and technologies.



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Defining new media:

In simple term 'new media' in general refer to those digital media that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication, and involve some form of computing as opposed to the 'old media' such as the telephone, radio and TV. These older media, which in their original incarnation did not require computer technology, now in present configuration do make the use of computer technology. As defined by the Oxford Dictionary, 'new media means of mass communication using digital technologies such as the Internet.' New Media is the forms of communicating in the digital world, which includes publishing on CDs, DVDs and, most significantly, over the Internet.^{vi}

The boundaries between the tradition media and new media have blurred. New media technologies enabled the same content to flow through various different channels and assume many different forms at the point of reception. Thus initiated the process of media convergence.^{vii} The positive side of the new media technologies is that they have brought down the production and distribution costs, increased the delivery channels, enhanced the reach of the existing delivery channels, present various options to the consumers, provided the consumer to maintain archives, interpret, share the media content in various channels and with more impact. However, the flip side of these new media technologies is that they have augmented the concentration of ownership, especially in mainstream media, where only a group of 'elites' is dominating the media sector.

New Media landscape in India:

The recent decade saw the strong emergence of new media in India. At present the Indian new media landscape have got a boost with rapid technological innovations along with optimistic changing patterns and growth in media industry. Today Indian new media is buzzing with the technological developments like social media interactive platforms, podcasts, RSS feeds, micro blogs, websites, online instant messaging services etc., which have transformed the very dynamics of Indian media landscape. One can witness the amalgamation of real world with virtual, traditional media with the digital and passive audience transforming into active audience. This new landscape



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has its own challenges and potentials and initiated a new era in the Indian media industry based on three important factors, that is, to connect, to collaborate and to create.

Indian new media at present:

Following are the key highlights from the 2013 India Digital Future in Focus report^{viii} by comScore^{ix}:

- Indian online population currently ranks as the 3rd largest in the world after China and the U.S. Around 73.9 million home and work Internet users are in India.
- It surpassed Japan in March 2013 and registered a year-over-year (YoY) growth of 31%.
- 75% of its Internet users under the age of 35.
- India has the youngest skewing online population among Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) countries.
- Across all age and gender groups, women between the ages of 35-44 years old are the heaviest Internet users in the Indian market.
- The Indian blogging audience grew 48 % in the past year to 36 million visitors, while 26% of category traffic comes from mobile phones and tablets.
- 54 million Internet users in India watched online videos on their computer, representing a 27% increase over the past year.
- Predominantly the Internet user use mobiles to access the Internet and various social media platforms.
- About 17% of the Indian population is between 15 and 24 years old, and they are experiencing the changes brought by new media technologies most dramatically in their personal and professional lives.^x



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- The access of the new media technology by Indians exposure of Indians, including young Indians, depends heavily on social locations—including gender, caste, class, and place of residence—in this highly stratified society.^{xi} Thus creating a digital divide, between those who have access to the new media technologies and those who don't.

Future trends:

The future trend indicates that the new technologies and innovations will continue to alter the dynamics of new media in term of content/ message production, information dissemination and the audience participation. The changes will bring challenges before the authorities, especially when it will come to freedom of expression. In terms of freedom, we will also witness the 'attempts by traditional authorities to control the new media use of young people through discourses on sexual danger and moral panic.'^{xii} The recent ban on the documentary 'India's Daughter' by BBC documentary is one such example. Furthermore, the Indian new media will continue to witness the strain between the commercial consumption of new media technologies by the country's growing middle class and the use of these same technologies for development purposes.^{xiii} On the front of increasing digital divide challenge, in order to fill this chasm and to equip the large number of economically backward Indians who can potentially be served by new media technologies, commercialization and Information and communication technologies for development (ICTD)^{xiv} will continue to work together in so-called Bottom of the Pyramid (BoP) initiatives. Attempts to provide Indians with access to computers are a good example of such programs.^{xv} More advanced media devices with better access to social media platforms will be also seen in coming times.

To conclude, from today's perspective, some apparently major challenges are posed by the impact of (now) new media technologies, like the ephemeral nature of online content and social media communication or the hybridization and amalgamation of public and private spheres on the web; in other words, these are the challenges posed by digitalization.^{xvi} And Indian new media landscape will be no exception in terms of challenges but have a huge potential, which can be tapped to make India smart cities with knowledge based society.



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(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

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ⁱ Jones, Steve. "Introduction." In *Encyclopedia of New Media: An Essential Reference to Communication and Technology*, 1. New York: SAGE Publications, 2002.

ⁱⁱ Marvin, Carolyn. "Introduction." In *When Old Technologies Were New : Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century*, 3. Madison Avenue, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid,n.1

^{iv} McLuhan, M. and Q. Fiore. (1967). *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*. Co-ordinated by J. Agel. New York, London, Toronto: Bantam Books

^v Levinson, Paul. "Through a Glass, Brightly." In *Digital McLuhan: A Guide to the Information Millennium*, 174. New York: Taylor & Francis, 1999.

^{vi} "Definition of New Media." Ziff Davis, LLC. PCMag Digital Group. <http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia/term/47936/new-media>. Accessed July 24, 2014.

^{vii} Jenkins, Henry. "Introduction." In *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 10. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

^{viii} "ComScore Releases the "2013 India Digital Future in Focus" Report." ComScore. August 22, 2013.. <https://www.comscore.com/Insights/Press-Releases/2013/8/comScore-Releases-the-2013-India-Digital-Future-in-Focus-Report>. Accessed June 11, 2014

^{ix} comScore is a leading internet technology company that measures what people do as they navigate the digital world - and turns that information into insights and actions for our clients to maximize the value of their digital investments

^x Schwittay, Anke. "New Media Practices in India: Bridging Past and Future, Markets and Development." *International Journal of Communication* 5, no. 20110349 (2011): 348.

^{xi} Ibid.n.xii.p352



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^{xii} Ravindran, G. (2008). The cultural politics of new media modernity in India: Reading the roles of moral panic agents and mobile phone Users. Paper presented at International Workshop on ICTs and Development: Experiences from Asia. National University of Singapore, Singapore.

^{xiii} Ibid.n.xii.p350

^{xiv} Information and Communication Technologies for Development

^{xv} Ibid.xv

^{xvi} Schwarzenegger, Christian. 'Exploring Digital Yesterdays – Reflections On New Media And The Future Of Communication'. *Historical Social Research* 37, no. 4 (2012): 118.